

Stranger Things: Night Skies by OnionSan93

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Summary: Stranger Things just ended its latest season, but I'm left wanting more. I like these characters and want us to spend more time with them.

1. The Outsiders

-Hawkin's Blood Drive-

The red sharpie bled through the white poster outside the gymnasium. Students congealed inside on clinical chairs set up by doctors from the General Hospital. Surgical masks concealed their faces. The hypodermic needle punctured the student's cubital vein. Their eyes measured the sample of blood filtering into the vial. Nancy Wheeler carefully guided the patients to their reward on table set up with cookies, brownies, and kool-aid.

"Hey, man, don't touch me!" A voice yelled from the entrance.

Nancy saw Steve shoved into the gym by Dustin. Steve struggled to fight back with the nine year old. Steve almost tripped inside. Several sophomore girls watched.

Steve quickly caught himself and fixed his well maintained hair, "Hey, ladies, what's going on?"

As soon as the girls disappeared Steve continued to fight Dustin, "Uh-uh man you lost the bet. You have give blood now."

"No!" Steve protested.

"C'mon what are you, Steve Harrington, afraid of!" Dustin yelled. His voice boomed in the gym.

"Dude, seriously, I'm gonna kick your ass! Let me out of here."

"What? It's just a big long needle they stick inside you and drain your blood."

Nancy then saw Jonathan try to maneuver past them. He smiled at her as soon as he saw her. Nancy abandoned her patient. She straighten the creases of her skirt. They met in the middle of the gym.

"Here for the blood drive? Or just the snacks?" Nancy winked.

He smiled shyly unsure how to answer, "Uhm both?" He fidgeted with

his backpack trying to adjust it.

"Nervous?"

Before Jonathan answered Nancy, both of them turned their heads at a loud crash.

Dustin sat on top of Steve, "How do you have trouble beating up a kid?"

"Cause you're so fat!"

A whistle from the coach commanded the two to stop, "Hey, Harrington! Stop acting like a girl and donate your blood!"

Nancy and Jonathan shared a laugh and then Jonathan said, "Not like him." He noticed Nancy's wardrobe. She wore a red buttoned down long sleeve shirt with yellow polka dots tucked into a black overall winner jumper, "You look nice," Jonathan said quietly, "the red really fits the today's theme." Nancy cheeks frosted with blush.

She intertwined her slender fingers with Jonathan's and led him to the clinical chair. Jonathan unslung his backpack, set it aside, and retired his black denim jacket. "Get cozy and I'll snatch you a cookie."

"And kool-aid?" Jonathan requested.

"And kool-aid."

Jonathan tried to relax on his cushioned seat and laid his arm on the arm-rest. One of the doctors targeted him. His heart thudded at the sight of the syringe and the thought of the cold metal injecting into him. Watching Steve bargain with the coach relieved the tension.

"Hello," the muffled voice of a doctor addressed him, "and you are?" he asked this while he produced a tape bandage.

"John, Jonathan, Jonathan Byers."

The doctor did not regard him any further, "Ms. Wheeler?"

"Yes?" Nancy bounced over beside the clinical chair beside the

doctor.

"Wrap this around Mr. Byers' arm tightly."

She leaned over Jonathan's arm. The faint smell of her perfume sedated him. Nancy tied the tape bandage around Jonathan's arm. Jonathan sunk into the chair before his eyes glimpsed down Nancy's shirt. He quickly diverted his eyes. Nancy tightened the bandage more than necessary. It swelled his vein and hardened his muscle. The doctor flicked his latex finger at Jonathan's vein and injected the needle. He tried not to look.

Will, Lucas, and Max waited for Mr. Clarke as Mike took advantage of the teacher's absence. Under his desk, he fiddled with the buttons of his walkie. He tried to contact Elle. He whispered through the white noise. Will and Lucas surveyed the classroom entrance hoping Mr. Clarke would come.

"It's not like him to be late," Lucas observed.

"Maybe he's sick?" Will tried to provide an answer.

"Have you ever known Mr. Clarke to be sick?"

"Then what do you think?"

"Abducted by aliens?"

"Guys, can you shut up?" Mike said sharply, "Elle, do you copy? Elle, do you copy?"

"Mike," Lucas interjected, "Can you give it a rest? She hasn't answered all day. She's probably watching a movie."

Mike ignored him, "Elle, do you copy?"

"Or," Lucas smirked, "she's with another guy."

"Elle wouldn't do that!" Mike said in between calls.

"You haven't kept your hands off of her. She's gotten bored and found

herself in someone else's arms."

"I think you're talking about Max."

"We're still together!" Lucas said.

"It's been a week and your still with Max? That's a new record."

Mr. Clarke stumbled in. He took a deep breath, "Sorry I'm late class," he coughed, "I'm only...," he investigated his watch, "fifteen minutes late," his briefcase opened and spilled all the papers inside. He got to his knees to shuffle all the papers inside. He struggled to get up. Sweat staled his sweater vest.

"Do you need help?" Will almost got up from his seat.

"No, no, Mr. Byers," he tried to chuckle and sniffed all the phlegm into his nose, "I'm fine, really." He placed his briefcase on his desk, stood up straight and addressed the whole class. "Now, since Hawkins is doing its Blood Drive, I thought it would be a good idea to learn about blood vessels and their role in blood circulation. You see kids, blood vessels transport blood throughout the body. The most important types, veins and arteries, carry blood to and from the..."

"He looks sick," Will whispered to Lucas and Mike.

"He looks like death," Lucas whispered back.

"Please no talking!" Mr. Clarke voice shook, "Now, as per usual, I would discuss from the textbook about the role of vessels and arteries, but I thought it would be fun to watch a good ol' educational film from the projector." The class shuffled in excitement. Mr. Clarke smiled and nodded, "The film is called "All Roads Go to the Heart" and I will pass out a sheet of paper about the film and you have to fill out the blanks."

"Awww," the class bemoaned.

"Can someone help me bring in the projector?"

"Sure," Will said. He left his seat to follow Mr. Clarke to the back closet. Will kept his eye on him. Up close, Mr. Clarke skin turned pale and around his eyes swelled with the weight of depravity. He opened

the closet door and Will helped him cart the film projector to the front of the class. His whole body shuddered when he sneezed. Salvia sprayed from his mouth onto the projector. Mr. Clarke collapsed over the projector and tumbled with it to the ground.

The rest of the students ambushed the fallen teacher. Will, Lucas and Mike knelt down in front of him.

"Mr. Clarke!" the boys shouted.

Will ran out of the class into the hallway. In the nurses' office he shrieked for medical attention. One nurse exited from their office. She was not the regular nurse provided by the school. A surgical mask concealed her face. Will hesitated before he pleaded for help. The nurse stared at Will before she followed him into the classroom. The class allowed the woman to breach the circle around Mr. Clarke. The nurse did not ask him any questions, but instructed the students back into their seats.

"Is he going to be okay?" Mike asked

The nurse did not answer. She was able to pick him back up on his feet and guided the still conscious teacher out of the classroom. Will, Mike, and Lucas watched them from out the classroom door.

"Feet off the table," Florence barked at Sheriff James "Jim" Hopper. She settle a newly brewed cup of coffee on his desk.

He lowered the newspaper on the desk and inhaled the fresh black coffee, "Ahh, Florence, what would I do without you?" He properly sat in his chair and leaned over for the coffee.

Florence cleared her throat, "The Byer's woman is waiting outside for you."

Jim almost choked on his coffee, "What?"

Florence shuffled out as if she did not hear him, "Tuck in your shirt. At least try to look presentable."

Jim tried not to spill the coffee before he reached for a napkin to

wipe his mouth. He sprung up, struggled to tuck in his sheriff shirt. He unbuttoned his pants letting his gut spill out. Jim desperately jammed in his shirt. Someone knocked on his office door. He looked up and saw Joyce frozen in place. She looked at his face, then his unbuttoned pants and then at his face. She covered her eyes and shut the door behind her. Jim gave up. He took his time before properly putting himself together.

"Can I come in?" Joyce shrill voice called behind the door.

In his last attempt, Jim sucked in his gut. "Yeah." he said.

Joyce opened the door with eyes closed and then opened one eye, "Ya good?"

He nodded, "Okay, I'm sorry if this is a bit of a surprise but I really need your help." She paced around the office, "I, uh, am having a special guest over tonight and he's really not suppose to be here. He caught me by surprise on the phone and..." The white noise of a walkie interrupted her. She covered her mouth, "Are you doing some sort of sting operation? Am I not suppose to be here? Sorry! They didn't tell me!"

Jim noticed the walkie on his table. He ran toward Joyce in a panic, covered her mouth, opened the door, and let themselves through. "Shhh. Yes, I'm doing something like that. Elle stole one of my walkies to talk to the Wheeler kid while he's at school. The kids do not know I confiscated it. They've been at it for the last week and it's driving me crazy. He's been keeping her up long past her bed time. It's been funny listening to him sweat over it." Joyce nodded and then muffled something, "What?"

She put his hand off her mouth, "I said get your hand off me."

"Sorry. You were talking about something?"

Joyce thought over her words, "Would you like to pretend to be my husband for dinner tonight?"

Rows of twisted oak interfaced the granite riparian strip. The sun's

dull light inflamed the orange and red leaves. Their remains rained onto the road's empty pavement. A slight breeze inflated Nancy's skirt. She walked beside Jonathan. He remained quiet for most of the way. Nancy saw from quick glances how tired he looked. He always did. She wondered if they may have taken too much blood. Jonathan caught her.

He smiled and she smiled, "What?"

"Are you okay? You look exhausted."

"No...I'm just deep in thought."

"You always look like you are. Anything specific?"

"Mostly Will. He's been more withdrawn since last year. Barely talks."

"You two have that in common," she winked at him. She tried to get his mind off of it.

Jonathan smiled, "Should I be like you and talk more?"

"I don't talk that often."

"You get quite obsessive. Relentless, even."

Nancy scoffed and nudged Jonathan and he nudged her back. A kid on a bike zoomed passed them and a dog chased after him. Nancy stopped to watch the pursuit thoughtfully. Jonathan stopped to watch her, "What about you? You actually haven't been that talkative lately." Nancy should have expected him to notice. Their eyes met. "What have you been thinking about? Bad grades? Home?" Jonathan looked deep into her eyes searching for an answer himself.

Nancy looked down and did not answer for a few moments, "It's my friends. I see them, they look at me, and...it's like they see a different person. I don't know. I can't narrow it down."

"And that's...frustrating?"

"It is!" She quickly looked up at him innocently.

A sound of several cars revved slowly behind them. They shifted their attention to a limo followed by black cars. Jonathan and Nancy stepped aside to the curb. The sun glazed over their black tinted windows.

"That's like the third procession I've seen," Nancy observed by the curb.

Jonathan and Nancy returned to their walk. Dark columns of road tumbled toward a neighborhood. Years of sun bleached the technicolor houses. They turned into the adjacent street. Jonathan's street. Jonathan always walked Nancy the long way to her house. They stayed over for dinner at her house and then go to her room to work on homework. Jonathan never been with another girl, but knew Nancy was different. He knew how to talk to her, he knew how to kiss her, and when alone on the bed, he knew where to put his hands on her. Who Jonathan saw on his porch with his mother made him want to seek the warm shelter of Nancy arms. His mother and Sheriff Hopper saw him, but so did his father, Lonnie. He raised a drink at Jonathan.

"Hey-hey," Lonnie said, "Jonathan, we've been waiting all day for you. How was your day?"

2. The Ultimate Computer

Will met Lucas, Mike, Dustin, and Max outside the administration office.

"Alright," Max shrugged, "Why are we still in school and not at home?"

"Mr. Clarke collapsed during our lesson," Will said.

Dustin sighed, "Oh shit? Is he alright?"

"That's what we're here to find out," Mike said.

The kids entered the administration office. The woman at the front desk spotted them through her thick rimmed glasses, "Aren't you kids suppose to be at home?"

"We know, but our science teacher got sick and fell during class. We just want to know if he's alright."

"Name?"

"Mr. Clarke."

"Oh, well, you don't have to worry about him. He left just before you boys got here."

"Are you sure because...",

"Yes," the administrator interrupted quickly and sternly.

"He's was pretty sick," Mike said.

"And the nurse checked up on him and then he was all better."

"Magically? Just like that," Lucas said in disbelief.

"Kids, I believe you should get home. You don't want to worry your parents now do you?"

Out the wall, Will saw the nurse from before. The boys followed Will

to the nurse despite the administrator's objection, "Hey, you took Mr. Clarke here, right? Is he okay?"

The nurse stared at the kids for a moment. She still had on her uniform, face mask and all. "Mr. Clarke," her voice muffled, "was sent home completely healthy. It was just a case of bad food poisoning."

"Well, that was a waste of time," Max complained, "Now, can we go?"

Will thought for a moment and said, "Yeah."

The kids followed the grey tongue of concrete toward the black tarmac parking lot. They unchained their bikes against the honeycombed fence. Rust scabbed the metal. Dead leaves scaled the fence. Before Max said goodbye Will asked for her to stay.

"I have to get home. Billy is..."

A loud honk scared all five of them. Inside his black Camaro, Billy honked his horn again.

"Hey, you little shits, don't keep me waiting!"

"That nurse is weird," Will still shuddered

"Your Willy-Sense going off?" Dustin said. All three boys stiffened.

"Gross!" Max exclaimed, "What are you talking about?"

"I thought we decided on Demagorgen-Sense," Lucas suggested.

"That's too long," Mike interjected.

"Look, it doesn't matter," Will said, "I feel like something is off. I think we should check on Mr. Clarke ourselves."

"Shouldn't you call your parents first?" Max said, but Billy honked his horn multiple times, "Shut up!" She looked back at the boys, "The nurse said he was fine. Sure she was creepy, but all doctors are."

"Fine," Lucas teased, "if you want to spend the rest of your day with homework and your overprotective brother be our guest."

Max actually considered what he said, but then pushed him. She walked over to Billy's car. They started arguing, but the car's back tires screeched. The tires spat pebbles into the air. He sped out of the school's parking lot. Max returned to the boys, "Let's get this over with. I have homework."

Nancy sat with Jonathan on his bed. He hunched over looking past the room. Nancy could not think of a time when Jonathan spoke about his father. She understood that his parents divorced. Nancy waited for Jonathan to say something.

"I don't think we'll be able to do homework tonight. Maybe you shouldn't stay."

"Why? You don't want me to meet your dad?"

"You don't know him. He never called. Never came over. Last time I saw him, Will went missing. He was the same as he ever been. Now, he just shows up. It feels like...he never left. All those feelings came rushing back."

"What feelings?" Nancy tried to put it together, "You don't like your dad? Did he call you names? He didn't *hit* you did he?" Nancy hoped the latter was not true.

Jonathan forced his eyes shut and shook his head, "I...don't want to think about it. Not anymore."

Nancy moved her lips close to Jonathan's ear, "Then I won't go," she whispered. The tip of her nose traced up his ear and then she closed her lips at the top. The full weight of her body leaned against him. His forearm nuzzled between her breasts. Nancy straddled Jonathan on the bed. She leaned closer kissing him. He kissed her on the mouth, the cheek, and the neck. Nancy leaned back with Jonathan staring down her dress.

"What are you looking at Jonathan?"

"...Uhm..." his voice shook.

"Jonathan!" Joyce's hollered from the kitchen, "Nancy! Is everything

okay?"

"Everything's fine Ms. Byers," Nancy sighed.

Nancy stood up, left the bed, and took Jonathan by the hand. She guided him where Ms. and Mr. Byers, and Sheriff Hopper waited in the kitchen. Mr. Byers combed his graying hair to the side neatly, wore an opened jean jacket over a white tucked shirt that stretched over his abs. Sunglasses hung from his collar. He playfully strutted over to Nancy.

"And you are?"

"I'm Nancy Wheeler. Jonathan's girlfriend," she shook his cold hand.

"Waooh! Jonathan's got himself a knockout!" His eyes looked her over. Nancy noticed Jonathan glowered at him, "Has Jonathan ever mentioned me?"

"No."

"Oh," His chest deflated, "Well, my name is Lonnie. You haven't seen me around here, but that's because Joyce rightfully," he regarded Joyce, "kicked me out."

"I don't remember her taking you back in," Jonathan said.

"Now, now gentlemen," Joyce spread her arms between Jonathan and Lonnie, "Nancy is our guest. We should discuss these things in private, right husband?" Joyce looked at Jim who drank a beer from behind the kitchen counter, "Right, you're alway right my dear wife" he said after taking a sip. "Let's have this lovely dinner you prepared for all of us."

"Wife?" Jonathan and Nancy said at the same time.

Joyce gave them a glare, "Yes, now, let's go along with my dinner plan!"

Everyone sat down. Lonnie looked at everyone. "Now, now, I get it. It's presumptuous of me to come all this way from the city all of a sudden. Especially after I left everything." He regarded both Joyce

and Jonathan, "but I want to make something clear: I acted like a total asshole before and I want to make amends. I don't expect a simple sorry to work."

"You shouldn't, and it wouldn't" Jonathan said.

Lonnie nodded, "I have to make up for years of abuse. I owe the mother of my children that much. Speaking of which where's Will?"

It took a moment for Joyce to answer, "Umm, Uh, he called. He said he's sleeping over at Mike's house."

"Awww," Lonnie said, "I wanted to see how big he's gotten. I heard some crazy stuff happened to him. Ah, well, looks like he's going to miss the hell out of this good meal his mother made for him."

Everyone waited a moment to join him. Nancy noticed Jonathan stare at his plate.

Max held onto the back of Lucas' bike. The kids bicycled in the vague distortions of a neighborhood. The sun sunk into the horizon casting deep pools of shadows on the shattered concrete.

"How do you know where this Clarke guy lives," Max asked.

"We sometimes go over to his house for science projects," Dustin explained.

"Wow," Max snorted, "that's actually pretty sad even for you guys."

"Shut up. He's cool," Mike said.

They turn up into Mr. Clarke's driveway and dropped their bikes on his lawn. Will knocked on his door and rang the doorbell. They all waited, but after several moments no one appeared.

"Mr. Clarke. It's us. Will, Dustin, Mike, and Lucas!"

"*And Max!*" she pointed out.

"He's doesn't know you," Mike said.

"I'm just saying. It's not like I don't exist."

Will knocked on his door again about to give up. Defeated, he turned the knob before turning around.

"If he's better, why won't he answer?"

The door opened slightly. The kids looked at each other. Will called Mr. Clarke's name again, but still no one answered. Everyone dipped their toes inside the house.

"What are you guys doing? We can't access his house without his permission!"

"His door is open and nobody is inside!" Lucas tried to convince her. "You're not in the least bit curious?" Max still waited outside while the boys entered the house. A mourning dove droned from the empty neighborhood's trees nearby. She sighed, swore to herself, and jumped off the bridge with the others.

"Mr. Clarke!" Mike's voice cracked through the hall and up the stairs.

"Yo, Mr. Clarke!" Dustin shouted.

Lucas ran down the stairs, "Not up here."

"Not in the garage," Will said.

Max's red hair spun around with her looking for a place to help find him. She tucked her hair behind her ear when she entered the kitchen. A tea kettle surveyed the kitchen from on top of an island. A rug sectioned the kitchen from the living room. Framed pictures characterized people presumably from Mr. Clarke's family on a table behind a plaid couch. Their eyes regulated the kids activity. Max looked down a flight of stairs that led to a door.

"Hey! I found a door to a...basement? Guys get over here!" They all huddled around the top of the stairs silently. Max looked at all of them, "Well, are one of you gonna go?"

All the boys worked with Mr. Clarke only in his garage. Neither of them ever been inside or below it.

"Rock, paper, scissors for it?" Dustin said.

"Yeah that sounds good," Will said quickly.

Lucas and Mike nodded their heads.

"Way to be men," Max rolled her eyes.

Will and Mike challenged each other as did Dustin and Lucas. Mike won his round and so did Dustin. "Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!" They shook their fists. Dustin produced paper while Mike produced rock. "Rock beats paper!" Mike said.

"I believe paper beats rock my good sir."Dustin corrected.

"How does paper beat rock? It's just flimsy piece of paper."

"It's the rules."

"Who's rules?"

Max shut the door downstairs while the boys bickered. A loud crash almost made her squeak. The darkness pushed against her retinas. A red glow floated in the darkness at the other side. Her hand groped the wall for a light switch. Nebulous flurries flew around her. The light assaulted her as it filled in the room. Something scurried on the ground on the other side of a large desk. Cultured tubes and beakers and other science equipment took up space. Wires wrapped around the desk leading to a large computer next to case of the red glowing liquid. Max carefully walked over pieces of glass to the computer. She saw herself in the black screen of the monitor. She pressed the button to turn it on. Max never seen a computer as her family could never afford one. Nothing happened. She pressed it again. Nothing happened. She smacked it. It beeped. Static and random images scrambled on the screen until it turned black again. Then, a cursor pulsed in a phosphorus blue light.

Is this Dr. West?

Max looked at the keyboard and searched for the right keys, Yes.

Greetings Dr. West.

Max typed again, *Hello*.

How are you doing today?

Max thought for a moment, *Sick*.

I'm sorry to hear that. Let me send you a Get-Well-Soon Card.

Lines started forming into a rectangular box inside the screen. In the box, text appeared with wide looping letters *Get Well Soon, Mr. Clarke*.

"Woah!" Lucas said behind Max. Max jumped and this made everyone jump. Boxes fell from on top of a cabinet.

Max punched Lucas on the shoulder, "Dude, you scared the shit out of me. Don't do that!"

"Sorry," he said.

"Ask it where Mr. Clarke is!" Will said. His fingers started dancing on the keyboard, but Max objected.

"Hey, I'm using it." She pushed him out of the way.

"You had your fun let him use it."

"I was here first while you guys were too chickenshit to come down here!"

"Guys, guys!" Dustin screeched, "Wait a minute, look." Dustin pointed to floppy disks next to the computer. "Hawkins Police Department", "Hawkins Middle School", and "Hawkins General Hospital" labeled the floppies.

"Put in the school one!" Will blurted out.

Max took the floppy, but looked at the computer monitor blankly.

"It goes in the tower!"

"What tower?"

"Just, just, give it to me," Dustin snatched the floppy.

"Okay, sorry. I'm not a computer geek."

"Obviously." he deposited the floppy into the tower.

The screen remained blank until blue text rolled down.

PDF 11/270 WHO TIP # 45

Welcome to the Indiana Public School DataNet

Please login user password:

"Ah, shit." Dustin said, "Quick what would a school use for a password?"

"I don't think we should be doing this." Max said.

"Try...", Mike said, "password?"

Max gave him an incredulous look, "The school wouldn't use 'password'"

"Ruler? Desk? Sharpener?" Lucas said, "Pencil! Try pencil."

Dustin looked for the keys and typed pencil.

Password Verified

Please enter student/faculty member name:

"Put in Mr. Clarke's name," Will squealed.

"Yeah, yeah, I know, Jesus," Dustin stabbed each key for Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Clarke's picture rolled down the screen. His information scrolled next to his picture. It described his weight, sex, job title, and blood type. The final line of text read,

Condition: Stage 3: CD4 count 200 cells/u/

Footsteps alerted the kids of an intruder. Dustin frantically looked

around the tower to withdraw the floppy. He turned off the computer and looked with the others somewhere to hide. At the last moment, Dustin snatched the floppies and hid under the large desk with the others. They complained about being squashed inside, but Max ordered them to shut up. The door creaked open. The kids heard humming. His footsteps became louder and then fainter. The footsteps stopped. Dialing sounds commenced, then nothing. The person continued humming.

"Hello? Hello, hello, hello, *hel-llooooo!*" he sang, "Ah yes, Dominic? Yes it's me! Yes, the very same. How are you? Fine? Just fine? Not everything going to plan? Hmmm, everything is? But you're just fine? No, you're allowed to be fine. I have nothing against that. You can be just fine. I'm fine. In fact, I'm better than fine, but we actually shouldn't be fine. We found the cat. It was doing just fine like you, but then it was not. Things can change from fine to not fine time to time. The cat is going to die. Poor, poor cat. You should see it. It's in pain. We should put it out of its misery. Agree? It's fine, you say? Haha! Alright. Hmmm. Alright enjoy your fine day." the person hung up.

The person carried his feet back upstairs. The door shut when the kids collapsed out on the cabinet.

"Ow," Max complained, "Ugh, what the hell was that all about?"

"I don't know," Mike said, "We need to get out of here and fast before that guy comes back."

"He's was strange," Mike said.

"What's he doing here?" Will said.

"Dude," Dustin urged, "Don't worry about. Let's talk about it at Mike's place."

The kids silently walked up the stairs into the house's ground level. All of them inspected the area for the man, but he did not appear. They found their bikes in the darkness where they left them. The neighborhood became featureless in the night.

Joyce and Nancy soaked the dishes in frothy dishwater. Deputy Hopper and Lonnie's voices droned behind them on the table.

"I'm glad you came to dinner," Joyce rinsed her plate, "It's nice to have another girl around."

"No problem. Now that I think about it," Nancy said, "I don't think Jonathan's ever invited me here."

"Oh, he's just embarrassed. He's shy like that."

"Yeah, I know. He's always looks like something is on his mind. I never know what he's thinking."

"He's always been like that," Joyce sighed, "He's been talking a lot about you. Nancy this. Nancy that. He really likes you. He's also been out more. You really gotten him out of his shell."

Nancy giggled.

"Mom," Jonathan said from behind.

Joyce dropped the plate in the dish water. Water splashed everywhere. "Jesus, you scared me."

"Sorry. Can I help Nancy with the dishes. You can talk to Sheriff Hopper."

"Okay," Joyce said, "You two play nice."

Joyce dried her hands with a dish cloth. She joined with Jim and Lonnie. Jim slipped into his jacket, "I'm headin' out. Early shift tomorrow."

"I gotta go, too," Lonnie said.

Joyce hesitated, "You can stay here if you like. I can get a blanket. You can sleep on the couch."

"Nope," Lonnie waved his hands in front of him, "I've got to earn my place in your house. Besides, I'm already settled in an apartment nearby."

"Which one?" Joyce asked.

"The Indiana Apartments." Lonnie reached out his hand to shake Jim's hand, "Honor meeting you, Jim."

"Yeah, and that's Sheriff Hopper." Jim tried to squeeze Lonnie's hand tight.

Jim almost slammed the door behind him. Joyce opened the door before it closed, "Jim! Jim! Wait!" Jim stopped with his back still turned, "I didn't think it would go like that! I thought, I thought he be like before. I thought I would need you. But then he came in dressed like that and *smelled* like that..."

"It's okay Joyce," Jim sighed, "I'm heading over to the Fast Club for a drink. Maybe we can play house some other time." He winked at her and entered his car. "Say hi to Will for me. Okay?"

Jim turned on the ignition. He reversed the car onto the road. He put the car in drive and left the Byers' house. The streetlights hazed the dark road. The urban neighborhood scanned over his front window and sunk beneath the road behind him. He entered the intersection ambushed by retailers and restaurants. He stopped at a red light ruminating over what could have been tonight. He smiled at the fact that Joyce chose him to pretend to be her husband. He wanted one day to put a ring on her finger. It remained a dream. A dream found at the bottom of a drink at Fast Club. A pink neon sign incubated the parking lot of the night club. He parked his car. Jim entered the dark tunnel secured by velvet red ropes. Jim squeezed himself into the busy club. He fanned his nose at the cigar smoke that stung his eyes. He found himself a vacant seat at the bar. An older gentleman haunted the counter. This bartender spotted Jim with warm brown eyes encased in waxy skin. The bartender poured a drink Jim requested.

"Whoa, whoa," Jim said with the glass still lifted into the air, "Put in a little more cowboy."

The man acquiesced. Jim inspected the area. The lights dimmed. A wedge of light cut into the darkness on the stage. From the curtains, a young man appeared. He stopped in front of the mic.

Danke schoen, darling, danke schoen

Thank you for all the joy and pain

Picture shows, second balcony was the place we'd meet

Second seat, go Dutch treat, you were sweet

Jim ordered a stronger drink. He looked around. Darkness mossed the patrons mesmerized by the boy's performance. Jim examined the men on the row of stools. He saw Lonnie who flirted with a woman next to him. His eyes darted towards Jim. Jim moved quickly to be blocked by the man sitting beside him.

"Son of a bitch," he swore to himself.

His wanted to call Joyce right away, but the drink told Jim Lonnie deserved much worse. He waited until Lonnie left his seat.

Danke schoen, darling, danke schoen

Thank you for walks down Lover's Lane

I can see hearts carved on a tree

Letters intertwined for all time

Yours and mine, that was fine

Lonnie left his seat. Jim waited a moment to follow him. He took one last swig for courage. His feet stomped on the way to the men's bathroom. He clenched his fists. He wished he could have seen through his facade earlier. He should have dragged his body over the porch table by the collar. Beaten him to a bloody pulp.

Danke schoen, darling, danke schoen

Thank you for seeing me again

Though we go on our separate ways

Still the memory stays for alway

Heard Joyce's squeals of delight. Her hair bouncing with her up and down. Take her in his strong arms and kissed her soft lips. Jim sucked in a deep breath behind the bathroom door. He shoved it open. He frantically searched for Lonnie, but he was not at the cake stained urinals or his shoes under the stalls. Jim turned around and saw a fist before the blurry bathroom walls spun around him. His hands caught the sinks. He turned around, but the person hit his side. A rib cracked. The attacker put his hands on Jim's shoulders. Jim's stomach absorbed several blows from kneecaps. Jim was then tucked under the person's arm. His elbow hit Jim's back pushing him on the floor. A pair of blurry feet came into view before darkness.

My heart says danke schoen

Danke schoen, auf wiedersehen

Danke schoen

"Encore! Encore," The Fast Club thundered in applause.